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DURENDERGER-SECRECY

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WASHINGTON (AP) -- A REPUBLICAN SENATOR INTRODUCED LEGISLATION WEDNESDAY TO LIMIT THE EFFECT OF PRESIDENT REAGAN'S RECENT ORDER EXPANDING THE GOVERNMENT'S POWER TO KEEP INFORMATION SECRET.

SEN. DALE DURENDERGER OF MINNESOTA SAID REAGAN'S APRIL 2 EXECUTIVE ORDER ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF GOVERNMENT INFORMATION "GOES FAR BEYOND WHAT EXPERIENCE AND PREVIOUS PRESIDENTIAL ORDERS HAVE TAUGHT US IS NEEDED TO PROTECT THE SECURITY OF OUR COUNTRY."

REAGAN'S ORDER, WHICH SUPERSEDED ONE ISSUED BY PRESIDENT CARTER AND HAS THE FORCE OF LAW, BROKE A 20-YEAR TREND TOWARD RESTRICTING THE USE OF THE SECRECY STAMP BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. MANY DEMOCRATS AND A COALITION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES, SCIENTIFIC, CONSUMER, LABOR AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS ATTACKED THE ORDER AND SAID IT WOULD REDUCE THE ABILITY OF CITIZENS TO USE THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT TO OBTAIN GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTS.

DURENDERGER, A MEMBER OF THE SENATE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE, PROPOSED TO REVERSE TWO OF THE CHANGES WHICH REAGAN MADE IN CARTER'S ORDER. SEN. PATRICK LEAHY OF VERMONT WAS LISTED AS THE MAJOR DEMOCRATIC CO-SPONSOR OF DURENDERGER'S BILL.

DURENDERGER'S BILL WOULD ALLOW GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO WITHHOLD CLASSIFIED DOCUMENTS ONLY IF THEIR RELEASE CAN BE REASONABLY EXPECTED TO CAUSE "IDENTIFIABLE DAMAGE TO NATIONAL SECURITY."

THE EXISTING FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT ALLOWS OFFICIALS TO DENY RELEASE OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION. CARTER HAD REQUIRED THAT OFFICIALS DETERMINE THAT "IDENTIFIABLE" DAMAGE WOULD RESULT FROM RELEASE BEFORE STAMPING A DOCUMENT CLASSIFIED. REAGAN DELETED THE "IDENTIFIABLE" PART OF THAT TEST.

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